



The New Look of Army Housing

Story by
LTC Marian R. Hansen

THE quality of life for married soldiers and their families at Fort Carson, Colo., is getting better because of housing privatization, said COL Peter Topp, the installation's director of public works.

"By 2004, every family on post will be living in a new or like-new house.

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Several innovative floor-plans will be available to Army families through housing privatization.

That was simply impossible under the conventional military-construction model," Topp said of the changes at Fort Carson.

One of the most impressive aspects of the construction is the speed at which it's occurring, Topp said. "The contractor broke ground on the 840 new houses in March 2000 and the first family moved in only seven months later," he said.

New houses are being completed at the rate of 21 units every month and all will be done by 2003. Renovation of all the existing housing is also a part of the program and that is progressing just as rapidly — at a rate of 40 houses each month.

Topp said the new homes are built to local commercial standards and include features such as double sinks in master bathrooms, walk-in closets, ceiling fans, and washers and dryers conveniently located on the second floor. Adding to the family-friendly environment are neighborhoods that include playgrounds, green space, running and biking trails, statues and a community center.

How did Fort Carson provide these new homes and amenities in such a short time? The answer is the Army's Residential Communities Initiative, a new program to create and renovate military housing, said Ted Lipham, RCI director.

The Army's family housing inventory is in critical condition, Lipham explained. Approximately

two-thirds of on-post housing units need major repairs, renovation or replacement, and there's a substantial deficit of suitable housing in many of the communities surrounding Army installations.

Under RCI, the Army is establishing partnerships with private developers to renovate, design and construct all family housing on selected posts. The development partners will also arrange for financing from private investors, hire and manage the contractors, operate the facilities, and provide ongoing maintenance and repair.

Once the units are privatized, the soldiers who live in them will receive their Basic Allowance for Housing and, using an electronic funds transfer, a specified amount will go to the developer for rent. Soldiers will receive another specified amount of the BAH to pay for utilities.

The Army's strategy is to privatize family housing where it makes sense and is financially feasible, while military construction funds will be used at sites where privatization is not feasible, Lipham said.

RCI programs have already begun at Fort Carson; Fort Hood, Texas; Fort Lewis, Wash.; and Fort Meade, Md. — and the Army is planning to expand the RCI to at least 16 more installations over the next four years. □

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